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A GREAT WORK LEFT UNDONE;

OR

The Desideratum in Systems of
Education.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED ON THE 26TH JANUARY, 1864.

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A GREAT WORK LEFT UNDONE ;

OR

The Desideratum in Systems of Education.

The subject on which I propose now to speak may be stated thus : The possibility and the duty of Moral Teaching apart from Religious, in all the schools in which the youth of the country receive elementary instruction.

Those who have given any attention to the subject of education, and are acquainted with its history in Canada, will immediately perceive, that what is now proposed is a matter of some magnitude. It supposes an innovation in the curriculum of all the schools—the introduction of new matter into the course of instruction ; it supposes an additional and very considerable demand upon the attention of master and pupil ; and this universally,—in every school and academy which has pupils of an age suitable for instruction.

I do not conceal from myself the probability, I may say the certainty, that the measure proposed will meet with opposition. It would be a vain hope to expect it will be readily adopted, or even very generally approved of, upon its first announcement. If any one should take the trouble of pondering the matter, many grave questions will naturally be suggested to him, and first require their necessary solution ; and

the question, if determined at all, will need to be determined by a comparison of advantages and disadvantages, and there may be counterbalancing considerations which it is difficult to estimate. If serious objections are offered, I can only say I shall listen to them with a very attending ear. However, I confess that my apprehension of difficulties chiefly arises from some forms of prejudice which I foresee must be encountered, and to some of these it is absolutely necessary to advert, were it only to show that there is any case at all presented for adjudication. Notwithstanding, I cannot easily persuade myself, that the plan which I am to endeavour to explain and recommend, has in itself anything which ought to dispose one to look upon it at once with an unfavourable eye. Some experience has convinced me that there are very many persons here who labour much for the benefit of their fellow-creatures, whose labour has much genuine love in it, and who will be the last to regard with indifference the suggestion of any method that promises to serve the same cause for which they labour. Confident in this, I venture to lay my humble contribution at the feet of those who may choose to take it up and deliberate as to its value as an instrument for good.

First of all, it may be said, that in regard to the matter in question things are well enough as they are. It may be said that there are very many schools in which moral instruction is given, and given very constantly, as proper occasions offer; that there are very few, if any, in which it is not given, since every master must feel it to be his duty to correct the misconduct of his pupils, to condemn the expression of all bad feeling, and rectify in them whatever he observes to be immoral in word or deed; it may be alleged that the books which they read at school, the Bible and other books well adapted for purposes of education, that the Sunday Schools, and expositions given by the teachers—that, by these and other means, children are not uninstructed in

their duties, and that any special means, in addition to these, is superfluous. Let all this be granted; let all this be supposed to be done with the greatest tenderness and care; still, that is not done which needs to be done. How irregular and desultory is all the moral instruction which the pupils receive when compared with the intellectual! Spelling, writing, grammar, reading, geography, and arithmetic, day after day, year after year, the work, in some division of these, proceeds steadily and perseveringly. To march through these, or most of them, at the highest possible speed, is the great task to be exacted from the pupil, and the end for which the master must supply every facility, and apply every spur he is at liberty to apply. Regularly, remorselessly, and with keen tension, goes on the preparation for the *business* of life, but what shall we say as to the preparation for the *duties* of life? These are, at most, a bye-work; they are to be learnt accidentally and in a random way, constituting but a vague and obscure kind of knowledge, reflecting the sentiments of this or that master, or of some other good man here and there, or the instructions of a parent, or the brief moral dicta of a catechism, if it happen to contain any, but yielding no moral illumination of any material value, no moral emotion of a permanent character. Will any parent, who has made the examination, after his children have passed through their course at school, say, for instance, that they have been carefully instructed in duties respecting truth, promises, engagements and contracts; instructed in the sinfulness of their violation by exaggerations, verbal evasions, reservations and shufflings; instructed as to immoral, unlawful, and extorted promises, as to the conditions which constitute valid engagements and contracts morally, as to what relieves the promisor from his obligation to the promisee, &c., &c.? will any parent say, that they have been instructed as to the benevolent affections that have respect to others, or as to the malevolent affections such as hatred, malice,

revenge, and the offences and crimes which these give rise to, their character and punishment? A simple enumeration of these, and of the duties and virtues that have respect to property, to purity, or chastity, to government and the laws, and the corresponding offences and crimes to be shunned, would tire your patience and require time and space which are not at my command. Human duties are numerous. They require to be taught in detail. To present them in the form of general apices or heads only, is practically useless. In this form they are cloudy and barren, like the tops of mountains. There are few, I presume, who will be disposed to contend for the sufficiency in this respect of the present system. I believe that no one will deny its insufficiency,—no one at least, who has a right apprehension of the value of what is desiderated, and an acquaintance with the actual state of education in the country, except those indeed, and I trust they are not many, in whom long practice generates the belief that the present course is something like perfection, and induces resistance to change as something destructive of it.

The work of moral instruction ought to be commenced as systematically and carefully as any other subject taught, whenever the scholars are capable of reading well, and of giving, in their examinations, an account of what they read. With a suitable text-book, there is nothing to prevent them, even at an early age, say between ten and fourteen, any two years between these, from attaining distinct conceptions of the most important points in relation to rights of person, of property, of contracts, of marriage, of government. These, and the corresponding obligations, as far as it is needful practically, might unquestionably be made intelligible to them. I think it also unquestionable, that it is the duty of some to teach them these things. They surely ought to be told what actions are held to be offences and crimes, in what light they are regarded, and with what punishments visited.

Not that this ought to be done with over-minuteness, but sufficiently to awaken reflection, and serve as so many cautions or warnings against law-breaking. I do not say that it is the result of any observation of my own, but I find it asserted that "judges and magistrates are sometimes compelled to punish offenders whom they believe *entirely ignorant* of the law they have violated." Of course, laws against crimes are always promulgated, but it does not follow that, in the remoter parts of the country especially, they are always known; and I think it extremely probable that many a sour and malignant nature would have been checked in his meditated crime, had he been previously made conscious of the detestation with which society regards it and fully acquainted with its consequences in regard to himself.

I fortify what has been said on this subject by the opinion of some of our most eminent judges and jurists.

The Hon. Mr. JUSTICE McCORD says as follows :

"I am *firmly convinced* that moral training in the Common Schools would greatly lessen crimes and offences."

The Hon. Mr. JUSTICE AYLWIN says :

"As to Common Schools without Moral Instruction, I conceive that it is robbery to the community, not to be thought of in any Christian land."

The Hon. Mr. JUSTICE BADGLEY says :

"I think that early habits and impressions of the better kind, whatever they may be, are the most lasting, and the tender charities of home, the kindnesses of early life, which all in some degree have experienced, however small that degree may be, are the most ineffaceable, and even in the most desperate subjects exhibit their power—their moral power—in temporarily softening and toning down the most abandoned and depraved. Such feelings predispose for Moral Instruction, to commence upon in the young, and if there is a stand-

point at all for any of them, cannot fail to be beneficial in their influence, if properly attended to, &c.

I am very much disposed to believe that criminals rarely turn to the consideration of how their offences may be regarded by the laws at the time of their commission. They know that the law, as regards them, is merely a means of punishment, and whatever may be their original motive for the commission of the crime, their great consideration is success, and it is only after that, that the avoidance of detection follows the fear of punishment."

The Hon. Mr. JUSTICE DAY expresses himself as follows :

"With respect to the ignorance of criminals, of the character of their acts, as viewed by the instructed and orderly classes of society, I have no doubt that, in frequent cases, it is very great, perhaps absolute among the children of the vicious. Trained in a course of vice, the moral sense becomes perverted, and the distinction between right and wrong rests chiefly upon the fear of detection and punishment.

I think it is exceptional, even among those whose childhood has not been passed in familiarity with crime and criminals, that they have a perception of the moral evil, the wrongdoing of their acts. They oftener regard themselves as in a state of natural warfare with the law and the more fortunate classes whom it protects, and consider themselves entitled to take all they can from them ; and oftener consider themselves as the injured than as the injuring party. This feeling comes out every day in the Criminal Courts, and I have often been struck with the reflection, how early our selfishness leads us to reverse all the rules of justice and morality.

It is unnecessary to say, after these hurried sentences, that not only the right, but the *only* right place to begin a sound reform, is with the young. I have little faith in efforts to reclaim old offenders. We are bound to continue them, but I fear success is very rare. If a judicious system of

Moral Training could be introduced into our Common Schools, it would be a great step in the right direction, the difficulty is, to avoid sectarianism, so that no jealousy should be excited among different religious denominations."

EDWARD CARTER, Q. C. :

"It frequently happens that the offenders are ignorant of the light in which their crimes are regarded by the law. More particularly is this the case with the classes known as juvenile offenders, who are very numerous, and who, from the want of moral instruction, early commence a career of crime, from which it is difficult to extricate them. A violation of the law becomes a crime in the offender, when he possesses knowledge to distinguish between right and wrong; but, without moral instruction, the power of discernment must, in many cases, be wanting; and that which is in reality a crime in the eye of the law, is regarded as nothing more than a clever or bold achievement.

The second question, whether moral instruction received by the young in the Common Schools would tend to lessen the number of offences, admits, in my opinion, of no doubt whatever. It is owing to the absence of moral instruction that crimes are so multiplied as to point out the necessity of directing our attention to the cause, and not only to the means of correction. The law may to a certain extent effect some good, by denouncing crime and punishing offenders. The best remedy, however, is a preventive one—to be secured only by a system of moral instruction in the Common Schools."

The part of the plan which I have now indicated, belongs strictly to the science of jurisprudence. But it is to be remembered that jurisprudence and morality are in a great measure one. They overlap each other practically, and the tendency of both is the same in kind; and it is on this account that I comprehend both under the more general designation of morality.

And here I beg to call attention to what I consider an important observation in regard to the object of the plan I have in view. The design is not specially nor chiefly directed to the class of persons termed *criminals*. That its effects will be beneficial in that lower sphere—that the number of criminals will be diminished, I hold unquestionable. Still, in every community, criminals may be expected. The species is immortal, because, in some natures, the hereditary corruption seems almost complete and the prospect of all human efforts at reformation as vain as the attempting a transformation of the species. The *only* thing with regard to the worst cases is hanging or constant confinement and constant occupation. But it is not from this class that the danger to society, as I believe, arises. Whatever it may be in the large cities of the older states of Europe, it is not from this quarter that the dangerous forces are likely to break out in Canada, but from another and far more widely extended class, and of which the individuals are comparatively respectable. Of this class there are multitudes almost entirely destitute of all sentiment of jural obligations—not absolutely irreligious, but whose moral discrimination is almost blindness itself, whose predominating motives are some form of rapacious selfishness, and who regard all the necessary institutions of society rather as obstructions to themselves than as the essential conditions of human well-being. This comparatively good class is tremendously numerous and extended.

After this, the moral duties, of which the forementioned are the expression in law, might be proceeded to,—duties of the affections, filial, parental, fraternal, &c—duties respecting property, truth, purity, public order. There is no cause why the virtues in connexion with these, and to which in our own language there are so many precise and intelligible denominations, should not be explicitly dwelt upon. A statement of human rights and obligations, of human duties and virtues, at once comprehensive enough and sufficiently plain

and explicit to be a suitable instrument of instruction, I suppose then to be placed in the hand of every master and of every scholar of the proper age, and that the teaching from this text-book shall go on simultaneously with the other exercises. This is the general outline of the plan.

It may be said there is no time for this. I think the objection of no value. Between the age of ten and twelve, or that of twelve and fourteen, according to the attainments or capacity of the pupils, even with all the other exercises ordinarily done, I feel confident that this exercise may be introduced without prejudice to their proficiency. The number of hours at school daily is no measure of the means of proficiency. The proficiency must always be exactly in the proportion of the amount of attention given. A lesser portion of time if spent attentively, or in earnest application, is much more successful than the lax inaction, which usually prevails for indefinite periods, in almost all the common schools. The pupils seem to think much, but for the greater part of the time, they actually think nothing to the purpose. The various subjects which are now taught are not found, generally speaking, by consequence of the variety, to be each less easily learnt. Granting, however, that the apprehension is well founded, are there not some subjects taught, comparatively insignificant, a lesser progress in which might well be conceded, and of which even an utter exclusion would be almost immaterial?

The success of teaching in the kind proposed must of course very much depend upon the moral earnestness and intelligence of the master. So does success in every other subject; and if competency in other things is looked for in the master, why may it not be looked for and required in this? There is also this to be said, as to the *matter* of the instruction recommended, that it will hardly be possible for the master himself, having moral principles constantly brought into his thoughts, not to feel their operative energy, when he strives

for the intellectual as well as the moral cultivation of his pupils ; and this is a consideration of some value, for many masters may themselves need to study the subject, and every master may exert a wide moral influence. At first, it will, no doubt, in the case of most teachers, bring some additional labour in the way of preparation, but it is a kind of labour that has incitements and rewards of its own. They will feel, if they are the right men in the right place, that they are distributing that which in its nature is a good imperishable, and will rejoice that in communicating their light to others, they have the happy experience that the candle of the Lord burns nothing the less brightly within themselves.

As to the possibility of communicating to the young the kind of knowledge which I desire to be taught universally as a part of the course in all schools, I may perhaps be allowed to say, that my own experience in teaching first suggested it, and furnished decisive evidence of it. It has often been to me the occasion of most agreeable surprise, to witness the facility with which young persons grasp the full significance of moral truths. I am convinced that there is that within them, which tends to reach forth to the laws of God, when they are explicitly set before them ; and I have often observed, that many who comparatively fail in other subjects, such as languages, grammar, and arithmetic, evince readiness of perception, and nice discrimination in questions of a moral nature, for one soul differeth from another soul in glory. This is a fact that cannot, I believe, be accounted for by the supposition of any marked difference of previous culture ; and although it may be next to impossible, in any two diverse cases, so to analyze the facts, as to determine anything conclusively with respect to the influence of *authority*, or *previous culture* in the production of the different susceptibilities adverted to, yet a comparison of many cases, in which the previous conditions are very similar, is, with me, even of itself, a justification of the belief, that there

exists originally and independently a tendency or power to feel and discriminate morally, stronger in some than in others ; but in point of fact, it is a tendency or power which, more or less, it may be said, is inherent in all, an incarnation of the eternal law, which God in his mercy has left in the souls of his immortal children, for all the calamity of the first and great transgression. Hence it is that the response of young persons to moral rules, when presented in clear and plain language, is generally immediate and spontaneous. In many instances this is so remarkably apparent that it is like the mere opening of the eyes to see the daylight. What child almost does not spontaneously recognize the duty of treating its parents with tenderness and respect ? And whenever its thoughts are detained upon it, how powerful are the emotions that rise up simultaneously with the first apprehension of a moral rule on the subject, and preserve it from oblivion, stored up amongst the many thousands of other objects that have their place in the hive of the ever active mind. It may have been observed by any one, who has ever noticed attentively the conduct of little boys engaged in their sports or games, how the sense of justice manifests itself when one of them happens to be detected in an act that violates it. You hear the indignant cry from some bystander, “ that’s cheating,” or on the other hand, the no less resentful denial of the charge. This is not entirely the effect of impressions from without. Some internal force, that gives them their vitality, must lie at the root of such feelings as these. I may mention a case that fell under my own particular observation. It was the case of a boy, who exhibited very strongly what I have always considered an original sentiment of truthfulness. Believing himself suspected of having told a lie, in consequence of a mere inadvertency of the way in which he had expressed himself in regard to some fact, he became restless and unhappy. The idea preyed upon him indeed to such a degree that his bodily health was visibly affected ; he could

no longer endure to live at strife with his own nature, in violation of an intuition so powerful, and to terminate his misery, determined upon self-destruction—an event that was only averted by an accidental occurrence that brought about an explanation. In this case there was no complexity to be discovered, no fears of after consequences, no personal interests in any way affected. I believe that it was an instance of purely moral consciousness, which thus appears to have been as powerful as could have been the belief of an avenging justice following him, even to the gates of hell. Nor is this to be wondered at, for even a heathen, could say : “ I hate, as I hate the gates of hell, the man who has one thing in his heart, another on his tongue.”

It is observable that the love of approbation is very strong in many young persons. It is a sentiment of which the tendency is certainly moral. Clearly it is a desire that seeks its gratification, on the ground of some good thing done or supposed to be done, of some excellence possessed or supposed to be possessed. It is a force against which the love of life or the fear of death, is as nothing ; the force of certain springs of action that have their source in the human heart, and which thus often manifests itself in early youth. And here I may be allowed to ask how it happens that while everybody acknowledges that the soul has in itself a power that tends to Music, there is at least an apparent reluctance to recognize the existence of a moral consciousness as inherent in the soul ? Music, and the perception of beauty in form and in colour, are not more to the “ manor born ” than are the moral powers, and probably are much less capable of cultivation upon the whole.

The truth is, that young persons are much more easily instructed in moral duties than persons of mature age. The instinctive or intuitional power by which they are apprehended, operates in them more directly and spontaneously than in others. Grown-up persons—the multitude of them,

at least—who never, in any part of their life, had their attention directed and steadily applied to moral subjects, can see them only through a medium that distorts and discolours them. The light that was in them has been darkened. The tendencies of the age, so vigorous and active, almost exclusively in the direction of material interests and advantages, have corrupted and choked up the fountain-heads of moral feeling. This is unconsciously manifested in a great variety of ways. Moralizing is the term with which a reference to duties is contemptuously parried. Moralizing is adverse to the gratification of sinful passions, and adverse to the expedition of business. As to the positive rules of duty, what are they not unusually thought to be, but the necessary and convenient regulations which people have adopted from time to time for their social intercourse, many of them useless, or positive hindrances to success in life—many of them antiquated since the time they were begotten in the clouds of past ages, and none of them dependent upon authority universally held as infallible. They are the things of yesterday or to-day, as they happen to suit the pleasures, the interests, or the conveniences of the community, or of any portion of it, or of any individual of it. How all this is to *ultimate*, is a very fearful question, but not the one in hand. Our hope must be in the *young*. Before they drift into the abyss they are more accessible. The divine in them may be more readily elicited and cultivated. The next generation will have, in a very great degree, its character determined by what is now done, or neglected to be done, for the children of this. As certainly as one generation goes and another comes, must the religious and moral training of the young now in the schools bear fruit in their maturer years; and unless successful efforts are now made in the right direction; unless, among the other sciences, the young are taught the science of their duties; and, I shall add, unless the truly religious and well-intentioned part of the community unite all their force to give

strength and depth to the moral training which it is proposed they shall receive, I, for one, am persuaded that all the efforts which are being made by all the different agencies now employed, will fail to confer on society here or anywhere the vast and invaluable blessings which they intend, and might otherwise be able to confer. If it were made a peremptory condition that such instruction should be given in every school that receives public aid, and the proper means adopted to secure its being given, I have the hope and complete conviction that people's judgments would be more discriminating, their feelings more vigorous as to every duty of human life, private and public, and, at no distant period, the general state of society be changed for the better, instead of sinking to a lower deep than the deep that is.

All that is necessary in this, as in other processes, is to draw the thoughts of the young at school to the subject day after day—to furnish them with correct forms of expression—that their conceptions may become clearer and clearer, and to lead them gradually over a field of important moral truths, so connected as to be the more easily remembered. The teacher, I am persuaded, will find his labour more successful than he might at first be disposed to expect. An unseen power, a certain *cœca potentia*, will soon yield itself, and supply the *matter* requisite for the exercise of the logical faculty. He will soon discover that something is prepared ready for his hand,—that there is some link of communication between the soul and its Creator, that something has been provided by that Divine providence, that has been awake from everlasting —“ There is a spirit in man, and it is the breath of the Almighty that giveth him *understanding*.”

Besides, the possibility of moral instruction seems to be generally acknowledged. In some sense or other, efforts are everywhere made, however irregularly or unwisely, to give a moral character to the young. Admonitions or remonstrances, friendly advice or earnest expressions of persuasion, are

occasionally given to some or all of his scholars by every good master; and the belief in the possibility and good effects of such means and kind of instruction is therefore to be presumed. There have always been many schools, even from the time of their first establishment in Europe in the 6th century, in which religious and moral instruction was given, or in which, when not given formally and systematically—the discipline and incidental teaching were of a highly moral character. Religious and moral teaching is alleged to be imperative in the Normal Schools of France. In Switzerland, we are informed that religious instruction, and instruction in the rights and duties of citizens, is given in the communal or parochial schools. Moral and religious teaching has not been overlooked in the schools of Holland and Prussia; and it cannot be doubted that the introduction of instruction of this kind into any Christian State in Europe or America would be matter of rejoicing to every statesman of character and influence. Upon the desirableness and beneficial effects of it, there is, of course, a general, and we may say, complete agreement of opinion. It is observable however, that, in all these cases religious instruction is connected with moral, whenever it is designed to adopt a general plan of education.

This brings me to the part of my subject at which I apprehend the chief difficulty to the plan proposed. Any general system of school education, into which, in the Protestant schools, religious and moral instruction conjointly should be introduced, need not be contemplated. It is a consummation, Oh! how devoutly—alas! how vainly to be wished. The consideration of it may be dismissed at once; that question, at least, is a settled one. But, leaving out the religious element, why, I ask, may not the moral element be retained as imperative? In suggesting this separation, I will not, I trust, be understood to assert the possibility of a separation of morality from religion understood absolutely, that is, as considered apart from the external conditions in which religion

subsists in human society. On the contrary, all our best and purest ideas of Moral Truth necessarily imply, and, at any rate, must infallibly assume, a Being in whom they reside in perfection. But, for practical purposes, *religions, or forms of religion, as they are*, are not necessarily connected with *Moral Instruction*. There is no reason in the world why it should not be given separately, and as fully as possible. The young are not on that account denied the religious instruction given by the Church to which they belong, or by any other means; nor can they be the less susceptible of being impressed by the powerful motives which religion presents, in consequence of the moral cultivation which they receive at school. They must only be so much the more susceptible of all good impressions; and it is hard to see how any good Christian, or any Christian Church, that acknowledges an interest in human salvation, and understands what it means, can innocently reject the help which, on a great scale, they may thus receive for the promotion of their object. They might as rationally object to the moral teaching of the laws of the land, without which there would be very little teaching indeed in any kind, or any human society better than that of the beasts of the field.

The churches of a country might naturally be expected to have respectively charge of the moral as well as of the religious instruction of the young of their own communion. It is the office of the Church *de jure*, to care for the education of the young, for Christ has said, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." It is the office of the Church *de facto*, to care for the education of the young, for the Church "baptizes them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, *i. e.* the children are hers spiritually, for she has received them into her fold. So far as the Church in Lower Canada is concerned, this has not been found practicable to the extent that is due. There are a few schools in

which clergymen take an active interest, but, even in these, the thing specially desiderated finds no prominent place, is not recognized as a regular part of the course, is not continuously and systematically taught. I doubt whether this be so done in any of the Protestant schools, or in any schools whatsoever: that is to say, the most valuable thing that can be done for the young of the present, and for the young and old of another generation, is left undone, or nearly so. The duties that relate to the regulation of their temper and passions—are these not to be touched upon? The duties that relate to their intercourse with their fellow-creatures—so interwoven, so diversified that there is hardly a day in one's conscious existence, in which, to act with uprightness and with a beneficial benevolence, the best educated moral sensibility and discrimination of the human being, are not called for—are these to be passed over as what may be well spared? The duties of the citizen,—in all the manifold cases in which he may be called upon to contribute voice or deed for the support of public order, for the furtherance of law, for the authority of the magistrate, or the defence of his country; in short, all those duties, the intelligent perception of which is generally essential as a basis of private, domestic and public virtue,—are not to be permitted to interrupt, as it is erroneously believed it would do, the solemn march of the business education. Reading, writing, arithmetic, &c., of course, I say nothing against them. These *must* be. It is honourable to the Canadian Government and people, that so liberal a provision has been made for elementary instruction in these subjects, and as to the more extended and earnest cultivation of all departments of literature and science, which of late years has been witnessed in the Colleges and High Schools, this is a fact which no one can contemplate but with thankfulness and gratification. But the question is chiefly in regard to the subjects taught in the Common Schools. Are then reading, writing, geography, and arithmetic—are

these the only subjects to be taught in them, with any serious purpose of proficiency? Is a system, in which these and these alone are recognized,—a system, which so many Christian teachers, so many Christian denominations, so many Christian statesmen ought to acquiesce in silently, or be contented with or honour with their praise? Are the youth of the country to be kept, for so important a period of their existence, closely intent upon that knowledge only which perishes in the using? Are the girls and boys to be let depart from their schools, writing, and reading, and calculating beings only? Are these to be the only qualifications or powers they are to be allowed to get possession of? Are these the nectar and ambrosia that are to maintain the moral life of Christ's lambs in the future heaven, you wish they may have, on earth?

The separation of the religious from the moral element is a compromise reluctant but indispensable. It is the only alternative. Were it possible for the Christian Church to employ concurrently both the religious and moral element, it would be a security many times multiplied for the success of the object in view. If it were possible, I would have the Church extend over the moral and religious intuitions of the youthful spirit the whole of her solemn and purifying influence. I would have that sacred realm entered only by the holiest ministers of truth,—I would have the lamps of the eternal light that glimmer so dimly amidst the ruins of a fallen nature, fed only by the purest and deftest hands; nor would I shrink with any over-scrupulous timidity from the employment of any of the ordinary means of impression, which the Church employs to symbolize the awful repugnance of heaven to every species of sin or moral evil, or to represent the tenderness and sweetness of the grace of God in Christ. But it avails nothing to say what one desires should be. Only I wish it to be understood in advocating the scheme of separation, that it is far from a pleasure that so sacred a thing as

the instruction of the young in this way, should be withdrawn from the direct agency of the Christian Church. Nor is it for me to utter thoughts of reproach to the blame of any Christian Churches, or denominations of Christians in times past, on which there is a trace of the broad seal of the great King, on the supposition of their having a part either in the way of silent acquiescence or incentive approval in the acts or series of acts which removed this sphere of labour from their care and jurisdiction severally.

I confess I see no cause why the ministers of the Christian faith of any Church or denomination should be opposed to the plan or method proposed; why, indeed, many of them should not act as the immediate agents in its successful accomplishment in the schools over which they have any direct authority or regulative influence. If they cannot enter into this fruitful field themselves, they will assuredly be the last to hinder others. In many of the common schools there are teachers,—would to heaven there were more—who, neither wanting in virtuous feeling, nor industrious study, could instruct their scholars, and that with no unper-
suasive voice, in the duties that human life demands, and the virtues by which it is adorned, according to the method proposed. This is a work which is not necessarily to be confined to the prophets, nor the sons of the prophets, if in the time of our extremity (as it seems but too manifest in our present circumstances it is) the visions of the prophets must fail and the prophecy cease, in this particular work to be done at so important a period—indeed the most critical period of our human life. If we are not to instruct the youth of the land in the law of the revealed Word, why deny them the benefit of instruction in the law *written in their hearts*. If we are not to supply them with the children's bread, why refuse them the crumbs that fall from their master's table?

My desire at least, and my convictions are, that what I propose will be found auxiliary to the great work which all

churches, and all good ministers of them, design and believe it their proper mission to accomplish. It is a process for the individual, not dissimilar to that which the Divine Wisdom adopted, when, in the early youth of mankind, he gave them from the holy mount, his law written on tables of stone. That law was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. It was the preparatory means for the higher and more spiritual cultivation under the Gospel of the Redeemer. And though it was confessedly rudimentary and incomplete, since Christ himself declared he came to *fulfil* it, was it therefore, I ask, ill-suited to the times? was it not infinitely well adapted to them and to the way-preparing of the heaven-descended feet? Had there been no such law, where would have been the Christianization of the world? In like manner, if the law written in their hearts, be drawn out and denoted in letters legible to the young—denoting those moral good things, which were commanded because they were good immutably and eternally, and not made good by their being commanded—denoting those things morally evil, which were prohibited because they are evil immutably and eternally, and have not become evil because prohibited—if this law is drawn out into the light of their reason, and amplified to them; if it be made manifest to them as a guide and a rule, to which, in accordance with a primordial law of our nature, they will turn for safety as naturally as the child turns to its mother's breast for its sustentation (for that is the tendency of the little good that is in man, however opposite may be the great wickedness and savageness that are in him,) then, I say, we institute for the youth of the individual a process similar to that which the law, given by the hands of Moses, commenced for some of the early tribes of mankind—that is to say, we are the school masters to bring them to Christ—prepare them for the blessed truths which they are to be taught by the Church in the kingdom of God.

I am aware that in many schools it is customary to use

the Sacred Scriptures as a sort of text-book ; and perhaps those who have authority to select the books to be read in the schools by the children, suppose they thereby fulfil all the duty which the possession of this authority involves. I fear they think so gratis. I fear they have not sufficiently reflected upon the adequacy or inadequacy of the means adopted. This is a subject on which it behoves me to speak with becoming diffidence, and with caution. I must, nevertheless, be explicit and distinct. I preface what I have to say with this, that there is no religious agency here, with which I am acquainted, and which the well-understanding men of this city or country prosecute for a purely moral and religious end, that I do not tolerate and heartily pray may be successful. I neither desire their being excluded nor superseded, but assert notwithstanding, that they cannot cover the ground which they ought to cover ; and there is a vast and howling wilderness into which they never penetrate, that may be pioneered and at least partially cultivated, by another agency which they do not recognize. With regard to the use of the Holy Scriptures as a text-book for religious instruction, I say nothing. The doctrines therein contained and deemed proper to be taught to the young, most Christian Churches have thought it necessary to formulate in short summaries or catechisms ; this is a significant fact. But it is the moral element that more immediately concerns us, and for this kind of instruction it does not very manifestly appear that the Holy Scriptures are a particularly suitable instrument. The moral precepts of the Holy Scriptures are not stated in a systematic form. To have any subject so stated, has many advantages in teaching. It greatly assists the memory. The dependent parts are more readily traced to the principle or rule, and the mind is accustomed to deduce subordinate rules, which are directly applicable to practice. Whether we look to the second table of the ancient law, or to the moral precepts of the New Testament, they are too general or summary for the

purpose in question. This is a great disadvantage, because, for purposes of instruction, they require to be folded out into their many parts, and to have those parts as connectedly and as clearly stated as possible. There is this also; in the New Testament, they generally transcend the stage of moral growth which the young can have attained to. They are often wound up, as in the parables, among the mysteries of the kingdom, and are, therefore, beyond the understanding and sympathies of young persons. They are for the most part, specially appropriate to that higher and more spiritual sphere of morality to which it is our Lord's design that men should be exalted, and ever more and more exalted in their progress in the divine life; and hence we find also, that moral precepts are usually given in connexion with doctrines which the young cannot be supposed to have any adequate notion of, such as the doctrine of the mortification of the flesh, and that of a spiritual regeneration. It is clear, I think, that the moral precepts and parables of the Holy Scriptures would require explanations more subtle or refined than would be readily comprehended, or indeed likely to be given in the common schools.

In illustration of the views I have now given on these points, I might cite the whole of the moral truths stated in the Holy Scriptures, and they are not so numerous-(being mostly of a general nature) as might at first be supposed. Still they are too numerous for citation, and I can only say that the foregoing deductions are made from a careful examination of them all.

There is another consideration, which I think not undeserving of being noticed here. In the absence of all direct and independent moral teaching, and when the Bible only is used, the belief is often generated and held through all the after existence, that moral truths have no other foundation than the authority which they derive from the Holy Scriptures. It is a matter of common observation, that there is

much in the current literature of the age ; much in the spirit of scientific enquiry, that often rushes to unverified conclusions ; much in the popular expression of opinions, striking at the foundation of widely spread and deeply laid beliefs, and these emanating alas ! even from high places—pure in intention, as I am bound in Christian charity to believe, but by no means innocent in consideration of the results.—I say there is much in all these to awaken a disastrous scepticism, the perniciousness of which, I suppose, no one can estimate. Hence, especially in the present generation, there may be many individuals who, without opportunity of investigating the claims of the Holy Scriptures upon our belief, or without inclination to abstract themselves from the secular activities of daily life to do so, receive into the unguarded heart, without corrupt purpose or malice prepense, thoughts of a sceptical nature. They may be seldom expressed ; their pernicious effects may be little apparent in those cases in which the individuals are hedged about by the customary laws of society, and the many influences favourable to correctness of conduct. Pernicious indeed such thoughts must be even to them ; but what must they be to the ruder natures ? They must be fatal. They must bring down into the dust not only their religious beliefs and feelings but their moral consciousness also ; *every* foundation must give way, and the ruin be complete ; no duty, no virtue can have any sanctity then ; no crime have any check, but its inconvenience or punishment. Now, leaving out the cases of moral idiots (for there are moral idiots as there are intellectual), no one, whose moral nature has been instructed and cultivated when young, could possibly be an example of this moral degradation. He could no more eradicate his trust in the validity of the moral truths he received, than he could eradicate his trust in the certainty of the intellectual truths of arithmetic, which he had received. They remain imperishable. The man could never excom-

municate himself from his own nature ; and why ? Why ? because then it is his nature, and because it has been made to grow *so far*, in obedience to the voice of his Creator. All that I desire to maintain is this, that it is possible and the duty of some, to lay in the hearts of the youth at school, such a substratum of moral culture and knowledge of moral truths, as will remain impregnable, and at all events operate beneficially ever afterwards ; and this is only a recognition of the ancient and received truth, “ Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The institution of Sunday Schools does not supersede or render unnecessary what is proposed to be done. Even on the supposition that practical morality were taught in the Sunday Schools, in the most unexceptionable form, of what use is one hour one day of the week for such a purpose, even if given to that subject only. It may be decided at once, that Sunday Schools want the suitable time for the expansion which it requires to make it of any value. It could be handled only in a very general and desultory manner ; nor, generally speaking, are the teachers in the Sunday Schools those who would be likely to undertake it, or carry it out successfully. Notwithstanding, great and manifold are the benefits that have resulted to the young from that institution ; let it remain perpetual and be accepted, as I believe it is, a kind of moral and religious agency, by which an extraordinary amount of good has been done. Only, as perhaps I may be allowed to say, great care ought to be taken in conveying to a child an impression or idea of Divine Grace not to silence or make vain the internal voice that shames him and makes him uneasy on the commission of wrong-doing. There must have been some religious indelicacy particularly objectionable in the religious instruction given to the child who, when detected in a lie and trick of roguery, could silence his remonstrant grandmamma

with a line of his hymn—"But Jesus pardons all my sins." That child was a postulant for liberty to do evil.

I clearly foresee that the chief difficulty to the reception of the plan which I propose, will be the persuasion, that the teaching of practical morality, apart from the specialities of revealed religion, will be ineffectual or nugatory. In a pamphlet published in 1856, by one who denominates himself "An American Clergyman," the object of which is to point out the utter futility as to moral results, and even the positive mischief of the adopted common school system, I find the following assertions: "Those who in former years were zealous in maturing our common school system, are beginning to open their eyes, and stand aghast at their own work. Instead of being convinced that their system has been attended with an increase of public virtue, they seem to be painfully conscious that in divorcing daily education from daily religion, they have been creating a keen, savage, remorseless monster of depravity, that is already lifting its head in terror over the land." The writer then proceeds to adduce, in coroboration of his views, the decided judgment of judges, of professors of Universities, and persons eminent for their piety, intelligence, and patriotism, concurring in the deep conviction that the common schools, "instead of cherishing lambs, are training up wolves" whose appetites are only sharpened by the additional prey which increased knowledge brings into the range of their vision. Hear his conclusion: "Every criminal of the next generation will plead before the bar of God against us, for not having provided for him an early training better calculated to restrain him from vice. Why not do it at once, before we see our land overrun by a horde of Goths and Vandals, generated in the bosom of our boasted civilization; before we see our nation forfeiting the very name of Christian; before we behold our Republican institutions—the glorious heritage purchased by the blood of our fathers trodden to the dust, by the turbulence of factions and unchristianized

millions." This individual expresses his perfect willingness, that every Christian denomination should have in the common schools, under their several jurisdictions, full liberty to give moral and religious instruction. It is clear however, that supposing them to have had that liberty, and to have used it, they would not have given the moral, whatever they may have done with respect to the religious, discipline. They would not have given the moral in the way I propose, and in the only way it may be expected to produce the desired effect. His view of moral discipline or instruction, which I suppose to be a common view, is, in my opinion, entirely erroneous. He says: "It is said that moral precepts can be inculcated in our schools. But what are precepts without the sanction of religion? What are mere prudential rules before the gusts of passion, or when assailed by strong temptation? What is sand before the ocean billows? What is chaff before the tempest?" I entirely dissent from the conclusion implied in his interrogatories. Might it not be asked even of religious precepts under the supposed conditions—What are *they*, generally speaking, but chaff before the tempest? Are there not conditions in which they are only as the sand before the ocean billow? The grounds of my confidence in the efficacy of the contrary opinion, have already been intimated with more or less explicitness. They are summarily these :

1st. The intuitional character of our moral perceptions is a fact which, of itself, carries with it the proof that, in a rational agent, the moral nature is susceptible of cultivation. They have an emotional as well as an intellectual side. There is, always in moral subjects, some proportion between exactness of obedience and completeness of knowledge—some natural vicinity between truth and goodness.

2nd. As a matter of experience, the efficacy of moral discipline and instruction might be evinced. It might be evinced by a reference to instances innumerable, in which no aid could have been received from Divine Revelation.

3rd. It might be evinced by a reference to the recorded opinions of the most competent judges in past ages and in the present.

4th. It might be evinced by an appeal to the common sense of mankind, in different ages and countries, and even to all known *languages*, by which men have endeavoured to appeal to the moral consciousness of their fellow-creatures, for the purpose of deepening their feeling of moral obligation and rendering their judgment more discriminating.

5th. There is yet another point which might be adduced, closely relative to these: no moral discipline and teaching *per se* could, in the present state of things, be absolutely separated from the Religious element. There is no chasm between the sense of duty and the recognition of God. No sooner does a human soul feel itself under a moral law, than it concludes almost instantaneously that God is the author of it; so that, over the whole sphere of duty there is drawn the solemnity and awfulness that are inspired by the presence of the Great Eye that never slumbers nor sleeps. Hence it is that, after all, there is practically an inseparable connexion between the moral and religious consciousness, however imperfectly the religious element may be developed, for God never leaves himself without a witness.

Much might be said on this subject, and much also on the fact, that there are thousands of individuals sincerely desirous of acting rightly or conscientiously, whose immoral acts are to be ascribed to ignorance or error. Unprepared, utterly unprepared in many cases, for distinguishing clearly the path of duty among the complicated courses of action in the midst of which they find themselves, and which necessarily result from the complex forms of civilized life, they fail, and, instead of doing the good they really desire to do, often inflict permanent and irreparable evils on the society which they influence. This is especially the case in regard to duties of a public description. How little are the magistrates of a

country supported and aided by the jural or moral sentiments of the people generally. How often do the verdicts of juries astound one with the conviction that their pathological sympathies are with the criminal, their moral sympathies not with the law. How little horror is excited by the atrocious crime of perjury, and how little are the frightful consequences of its prevalence realized. When a whole community repudiates its just debts, the gigantic sin excites no apprehension; the very magnitude of it seems to alter its nature.

There are multitudes of good, and good-meaning men, who seem to have the conviction that the material progress of the country is the whole contents of national prosperity—increased immigration, new markets for produce, increased commercial facilities of communication, development of the physical sources of wealth—as if all these good things would not soon collapse in confusion, without security of life and property—as if every one to whom the history of man is not a dead letter, did not know perfectly well that, unless the beliefs and moral sentiments of the people are energetically directed to the support of public order and influenced with the deepest veneration for its main instruments, the solemnities of religion and the scarcely less sacred laws that define and protect the rights of men among men, our brilliant prospects are, and can be, nothing but a paradise of fools. Without the walls of the churches, what is the universal cry? Material progress, material success,—these are the things; for these is the strong and perpetual cry: Who will show us any good? What we really need is the common love of public order, the strong persuasion of the duty of it, and the constant and persevering demand for it. Truly, the principle of freedom flourishes sufficiently here; but the fatal mischief is, that the principle of order languishes. Surely no martyrs for freedom are needed and probably never will be needed until that time arrive, which may God in his mercy avert, when moral evil having done its worst, a social state results,

as, alas! we see it sometimes does, similar in the body politic before its salvation, to that which an old poet holds necessary for the individual—

“For no just man in heaven can dwell”

“Until he first have passed through hell.”

It is a very remarkable thing to hear good and sensible men, in the present circumstances of the country, speaking and writing eloquently in praise of freedom, when they have occasion to speak to others the truth, which to others is due. It is a thing which might draw tears from the blessed angels, if they, coming to the gates of heaven, could hear what is spoken in these parts of the earth. Why is it that nothing almost is spoken in behalf of order? Can freedom continue that has not order for its basis? Have we not freedom to our heart's content? What more freedom can we desire, unless it be freedom to rob or to cut one another's throats? It is so perfectly absurd! It forces one to imagine an *Æsopian* fable like this: “Once upon a time, a dispute having arisen among the tame beasts of the earth, as to the wisdom of continuing to be governed by the laws and customs under which they had lived time immemorial, it was agreed to have the subject discussed in a convention of all, tame and wild together. The convention is summoned; all are assembled; and some of the graver of the tame were endeavouring, to recommend the ancient rules of order for the preservation and good guidance of the whole, when they were interrupted by the asses. The asses lifted up the thunders of their voice, and brayed so long and so loudly in eulogy of the principle of freedom, that the wild ones, excited by a theme so congenial to their instincts, sprang out upon the tame, and devoured them all, including the long-eared members of the convention themselves.”

He who, in his measures for the public well-being, should omit the consideration due to the Scriptural doctrine of human corruption, builds on a foundation as baseless as smoke. He

who overlooks, in human nature, its power to recognize an immutable and eternal morality, would construct only an absolute despotism, where external force and authority would be the sole instruments of obedience. With us, to overlook this moral power must be a fatal blunder. If the idea of patriotism is not a delusion ; if the love of man, as man, is an affection that can dwell in human hearts ; if we have the consciousness of a duty that we owe to the Blessed Being, whom men call God, it is in this direction that our efforts must be turned, and turned to the young, interweaving into their daily life the golden threads of moral truth, that they may be guided and governed in the path of duty,—enriched and prepared for the love of God in Christ.



